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SUBJECT: NINEWA: DIVERSITY OF VIEWS FROM ASSYRIAN CHRISTIAN
LEADERS IN AL QOSH

Classified By: PRT leader Alex Laskaris; reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

This is a Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) message.

11. (C) In a July 3 meeting with PRT and US Army civil affairs personnel, Mayor of Tal Kaif District (and Provincial Chairman of the Assyrian Democratic Movement) Basim Bello said Assyrians in Ninewa Province feel intimidated by the Kurds and suffer from a lack of essential services. Bello said the solution lies in the inclusion of all groups in the provincial government. He said civil rights protections for Christians will continue to be a concern whether predominantly Christian areas remain part of Ninewa or join the KRG. He reiterated his party's position that the Christian areas of Ninewa should form an autonomous region under Article 125 of the constitution. PRT leader stressed the USG's commitment to ensuring fair treatment of minority communities within Iraq and said minority protections will be an important indicator of the overall health of Iraqi democracy.

12. (C) In a separate meeting with Father Dinkha Issa, the Assyrian Christian priest in charge of the Monastery of Rabbi Hormiz and nearby Church of the Holy Virgin at Al Qosh, PRT leader asked about the welfare of Christians in Al Qosh. Dinkha expressed hope the church could help bring peace to an area that he described as "disputed between two governments" (the Government of Iraq and the KRG). Unlike Basim, Dinkha said there have been no problems with intimidation or interference from political parties or Kurdish security forces. He said the main problem for the church and its adjoining orphanage was inadequate drinking water; a new orphanage building, funded by KRG Minister of Finance Sarkis Aghajan, was nearly finished. He asked for help procuring a vehicle gate to help secure the monastery site.

13. (C) Comment: These two conversations with long-term PRT interlocutors reflect the differences of view within the Assyrian community. Both men are dedicated to protecting their community, but may come to different conclusions about how best to ensure its safety in a new Iraq. PRT will continue to cultivate close contact with all of Ninewah's minority groups and report the diversity of views held by key figures on questions of politics, security, and community identity. We will also explore the possibility of using our resources to help secure unique religious sites like the Monastery of Rabbi Hormiz, which is an invaluable piece of Iraq's national patrimony and a potential tourist attraction capable of generating wealth in a poor area.

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